

State should shine in solar energy production

Arizona has traditionally been a leader in solar energy.

In the 1990s, the Corporation Commission made Arizona the first state in the nation to require that utilities produce a portion of their energy through renewable sources.

Recently, other states have reved up their renewable efforts, and Arizona has fallen behind. As a result, today even New Jersey's installation rate for customer-owned solar electric systems far exceeds Arizona's.

But Arizona is now poised to retake our rightful place as the hotbed of solar energy production.

The Corporation Commission will soon be hearing a proposal to reform the Environmental Portfolio Standard, the main driver of renewable energy in our state. Under a newly revised EPS, the state's utilities would be required by the year 2025 to produce 15 percent of their retail energy sales from renewable sources such as distributed



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rooftops, wind energy or biomass plants that are beginning to crop up in northern Arizona.

Additionally, a number of solar-friendly bills are winding through the Legislature. Among them:

- House Bill 2374, sponsored by Rep. Lucy Mason, would increase allowable tax credits for solar energy devices per residence to \$5000 from \$1000, and

would increase the single residence credit for photovoltaic systems from \$1000 or 25 percent of cost (whichever is less) to \$3000 or 15 percent of cost (whichever is less). It also establishes a commercial tax credit for businesses installing solar.

- House Bill 2352, sponsored by Rep. Tom Boone, would require the School

guidelines for solar cooling and heating for upgrades and replacements.

Leaders from every position on the political spectrum are siding with solar, including conservatives like former Congressman Matt Salmon, who has emerged as a major force in the battle to bolster the state's solar commitment, and create good jobs in the process.

The governor has also weighed in heavily in favor of renewable energy. She recently signed an executive order requiring that all new state buildings have some renewable energy component, a measure that will help reduce utility costs footed by taxpayers.

Why all this attention to solar energy? Most likely it is because there is a growing consensus nationwide that renewable energy, contrary to the claims of its critics, is cost effective over time. While solar energy is more expensive to construct on a kilowatt to kilowatt basis than coal-fired power plants, it has other quantifiable

energy systems lessen the need for ugly, hard-to-site 500KV power lines, offset dirty power plant emissions that increase the rate of childhood asthma, utilize a no-cost local fuel supply and help to save water that would otherwise be used by power plants. Other forms of renewable energy can have similar positive impacts for Arizona too.

And for those residents who install photovoltaic panels on their homes, solar energy can pay itself off over the course of 12 to 15 years, at which time a consumer gets free energy. It is little wonder that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has called for the installation of solar panels on 1 million California homes.

With 296 days of sunshine per year, more than most states, Arizona can claim the title of the sunshine capital of the country. It is time now to make it the nation's solar energy capital.

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